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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personally responsible.

March, 1890.

QUESTION XXXVII.

Does the termination of the 19th century of the Christian era coincide with any of the great cycles referred to in the "Secret Doctrine"? And if so, does not that fact strongly corroborate the actual existence and the divine mission of the man Christ Jesus?

W. Q. J.—The first part of this question could not be answered to the satisfaction of the questioner, for the reason that the true cycles, their commencement and termination, are not given out by the Adepts, as that is a sacred matter pertaining to high initiations. But I should like to ask the questioner how he can, by any fair logic or argument, take the views of the writer of the *Secret Doctrine* in regard to the subject of cycles—about which she is fully informed and he knows nothing—and then base upon them an argument for the "actual existence and divine mission of the man Christ Jesus." And, as she says that there was no Christ Jesus as a man with a divine mission, no such conclusion as is drawn by the questioner could result from an affirmative answer to the first question.

But suppose we admit that the termination of the 19th cen-

tury A. D. coincides with some of the great cycles referred to in the *Secret Doctrine*, nothing would be proved respecting the "actual existence and divine mission of the man Christ Jesus," for the reason that there are many other eras, in other nations and religions, running at the present time, and doubtless it would be found that the termination of the century of some of them would more nearly coincide with some of the great eras than the Christian 19th century. In such a case, the founders of those religions or eras would have proof in the coincidence of the cycles,—in case that constitutes any proof at all. There are the Christian era, the Mohammedan era, the Hindu era, the Buddhist era, the Jain era, the Persian era, the Chinese era, and others. Now as some of the centuries in these various eras must coincide with some of the great cycles, it should follow from the questioner's position that there is corroboration for the "actual existence and divine mission" of the various great personages alleged by the various peoples and followers of the several faiths to be appearances of God upon earth, and the ones from whose births their respective eras may be reckoned. However, in my opinion, all these coincidences prove nothing for any great religion, or any Saviour, in any time or nation.

QUESTION XXXVIII.

Why are the helpers never helped?

Ans.—But they are. It is those who give no help who get none. Nothing is more certain than the enriching of him who is ready to give and glad to distribute. Christianity and Theosophy are entirely at one on that point. What you probably mean is, Why are the helpers not helped *in the way they have selected?* Well, that may be because they have selected a way to which they have no claim. Possibly they cherish a conviction that a Mahatma ought to appear to them, or that they should undergo some sudden internal illumination, or that great prosperity should descend on them, or that some one of life's trials should be removed. Or it may be that the way selected is injudicious, or misconceived, or even mischievous. It has

never been taught that, because we contribute to Theosophical extension, or bravely fight the battle for truth, or even sacrifice ourselves cheerfully for others' good, we thereby acquire the right to fix our terms. This would be, indeed, only another form of selfishness, and would recall the old question, "Master, what shall we have therefor?" What do you want the help for? So that you may the better help thereafter? Then you will certainly get it. To reimburse yourself for outlays? You may none the less get it, though hardly with exuberant interest. But in any case help is not necessarily financial or physical. It may be mental or spiritual, and it may come without your knowing it, and it may even now be on the way. An Adept once wrote, "Whatever you deserve, you will surely receive."

QUESTION XXXIX.

Would an ideal marriage necessarily retard advancement according to the Theosophical philosophy?

Ans.—By an "ideal" marriage is probably meant one by two congenial or complementary natures, prompted thereto by sincere affection. There would seem every reason why such should foster all nobler qualities, expand the best traits of heart and mind, and result in offspring who would themselves still further illustrate and transmit domestic virtues and happiness. Any philosophy, Theosophic or other, might regard such a spectacle with complacency, and consider it as promoting, not retarding, human advance.

Marriage, like many other natural and legitimate things, is a needful experience for the individual. Each of us has undergone it often in various incarnations, if not in this. There will come a time when that experience, like others of social life, will have been transcended in the upward course towards a purely spiritual existence. When that time is reached, the desire for it will disappear, not as being a craving for something injurious or retarding, but simply because the Ego is absorbed in other interests. Meantime, the desire for it exists, and as its presence shows that the time spoken of has not yet come, and as marriage is an entirely honorable estate, there would seem no

reason why the desirer should not marry. When he ought not to, he will not want to.

One may say that marriage, love of the fine arts, appreciation of refined surroundings, fancy for travel, literature, and professional study, are all elevated and befitting things, conformable to nature and right judgment, and tending to pure living and high thought. They are not, it is true, the pursuit of Adepts or of Nirmanakayas. But we belong not to either of these classes: we are still human beings and in the human stage of development. Either of two positions would be a mistake. It would be a mistake to regard an innocent mode of life, congruous with this stage, as an evil or a drawback; and it would be a mistake to suppose it our duty to adopt the habits of Adepts before we have attained Their character. Theosophy is worthless if not common-sense. When we become purely spiritual beings, perhaps even before, we can dispense with food and families and social life and clothes, but we need not think of doing so yet.

QUESTION XL.

A teacher of Theosophy says that not more than one in ten thousand is immortal. Is the statement correct? If so, what is the use of reincarnation, and for what are Theosophists working?

W. Q. J.—The second of the questions would not have been asked if more attention had been paid to the acquirement of an accurate understanding of the Theosophical philosophy. It has never been a secret doctrine that "but few among mortals strive for perfection and out of those only one in ten thousand reaches the end desired." These words are to be found in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which was printed first in English 100 years ago. But even if we did not have the direct statement in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the fundamental Theosophical doctrines compel us to the conclusion that many will fail to reach immortality. Since, however, the same doctrines teach us to analyze and determine as to what "many" or "us" means, we find that the theory under discussion applies solely to the lower or strictly human ego and not to Spirit. The object, therefore, of reincarnation is that all the possible egos may have the chance to

become immortal by uniting themselves with Spirit. If they do not, they lose. But further yet, it is laid down that the periods of evolution succeed each other in endless succession, and all who are "left over" unsaved at the end of any one of such periods are taken up again, in the succeeding evolution, for the purpose of working up to perfection. Thus in every Manvantara numbers of egos reach perfection, for that period is very long as mortals count years. I say "numbers" because in fact the number is very large, although, if compared to the entire whole, they may not seem to be many. This is what Theosophists are working for,—not only to reach perfection themselves but to help all other men to do so likewise. And they should remember that whether they like it or not the laws of life will bring them upon earth again and again until they believe in the doctrine, and aquire aspiration, and turn both into action.

But who is the "teacher of Theosophy" spoken of by the questioner?

Ans.—It has been made known that immortality is not a universal, indiscriminate, unconditioned endowment of humanity, but rather a prize, a boon to those who, through persistent effort to unite their Higher Principles with the Divine Atma, have succeeded in effecting that union, and so share in Its endless life. This is not, however, the exclusive teaching of Theosophy. There are very cogent arguments showing that the Christian scriptures hold, 1st, that annihilation is the fate of the persistently bad, and, 2d, that immortality is for those who have, as St. Paul states it, become "partakers of the divine nature." Nor does this seem unreasonable. If there are characters so irretrievably, hopelessly vile as to be beyond any remedial discipline, they must either remain a permanent blot on the field of being, or else be erased therefrom. Conversely, participation in an endless bliss would seem appropriate only to those whose characters fit them for it. There would certainly be no object in perpetuating types which are stunted or weak or unprogressive In humanity, as in lower kingdoms, it is conceivable that prolific Nature may evolve more units than are worth preserving.

That the proportion of men gaining immortality is but as one in ten thousand, who can say with authority? Nor are the figures important. As to to the other questions, one may urge that reincarnations give to every man the *chance* to gain the greatest of all prizes, and that Theosophists work to ensure that they and their fellow-men alike shall make that chance a certainty. The motive is abundantly strong to justify every effort, and the fact that Those who know incomparably more than we of the goal and the course to it urge Theosophic life and work as the right solvent for human ills, may dispel all misgivings as to either our duty or the result of it. It is significant that Jêsus, when asked, "Are there few that be saved?" replied, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

QUESTION XLI.

What is one to do, and how is one to proceed, in order to study one's self?

Ans.—This is the most difficult of all studies, because the student is at the same time the subject and the object of the study. If we were examining the nature of a particular animal, say a horse, we would first acquaint ourselves with the structure and functions of the genus horse, and then would inquire into the disposition and traits of the special horse before us. Similarly in study of self. We need first to know something of man, his origin, development, nature, and destiny; and then to proceed to an analysis of the individual man—one's self—who is to be understood.

As to man generically, a sufficiently accurate account can be had from the elementary treatises on Theosophy. One can therefrom apprehend his seven-fold constitution, the fact and the reason of his repeated rebirth, the purport and method of spiritual development, and the laws by conformity to which only may he hope to surmount material environment and attain to Moksha. Then comes inspection of the "I."

Now the central force in any individuality is its desires, for these give rise to motives, they to will, and it to action. First of all one must ascertain exactly what are the things he wishes

most, and what their order in influence. He does so by putting to himself this question: Suppose that I was offered my choice of every conceivable wish, which would I select? Frankly, unflinchingly, he must answer this. It may perhaps be beauty, wealth, distinction, responsive affection, ease, unlimited freedom in self-indulgence; it may be family prosperity, patriotism, or general philanthrophy; it may be the development of the spiritual nature and the annihilation of every obstacle to the fulfilment of the law and the aim of being. Whatever it is, the unveiling of it discloses to the student the *central desire* he holds. Then comes the question, What is the next most powerful wish, and so, successively, his longings are ranged in their order.

Running over the general course of his life, he may see how closely it is the expression of the main desire. Yet there are divagations and inconsistencies. This is because of cross-currents, militating wishes. He may be ambitious, and yet too indolent to pursue ambition ceaselessly; he may be spiritually-minded, and yet an occasional victim to the lusts of the flesh. This survey discloses the counter-objects, the temptations, the weaknesses which distort the symmetry of his purpose. If potent enough to subvert it, *they* would be the central force; if potent only to hamper, they express the extent of the opposing taste.

Just here, then, comes the question, How far, and with what persistency, has there been deliberate effort to combat this opposition and give the main desire unchecked advance? Scrutiny will show the degree of vacillation, and such stability as has been gained.

A man who understands his leading motives, the forces hindering them, and the degree of his combative strength, has learned much of his own nature and of his will-power. He may perceive *about* what will be his action in any given circumstances, and *about* how much strain will deflect him from his preferred path. And now he may profitably turn to an inspection of his mental attitude toward Truth. An essential thing for a student to know is his capacity for reception. Here the first question is, What is his instinctive pose before an unfamiliar doctrine? Is it contempt, antipathy, resentment? If so, this can only be be-

cause he supposes himself already in possession of certain truth, therefore *quoad hoc* infallible. Yet, evidently, such supposition disqualifies him at once from learning. How can he learn if he already knows? Hence the measure of his possibility of instruction depends upon the degree in which he has voided his mind of prepossession, prejudice, or certainty, and trained himself to openness, impartiality, and readiness to consider. The examination shows how much of conceit he has, and therefore how little of docility.

Detection of self-love in the matter of opinion makes easier its detection in other departments. Is the personality emphasized in its relations to other men, or are their rights seen and cherished as vigorously as his own? Is the self conceived of as an atom among atoms, or as a cell in the body of Humanity? What amount of energy is expended in doing good? Which thought is constantly uppermost, help to others or help to oneself?

These successive self-analyses disclose very much of the make-up of an individual. They show his attitude to others, his personal predilections and antipathies, his strengths and his weaknesses, his fitness or unfitness for intellectual progress, and the general habit of his life. But to have any accuracy, and consequently any value, they must be carried out with no concession to self-love, and with as cool and unflinching indifference to pain as if the subject was the operator in a curative surgical operation. Now the degree of this power is itself a matter for examination, and whenever a sore spot is touched, the examiner needs to query whether he is wholly just and frank. The exceeding difficulty of thorough analysis is increased by the almost universal lack of trained concentration of thought, of a distaste for introspective scrutiny, and of time to prosecute either. But, like other difficult acquirements, a beginning must be made some time, and it is not to be supposed that the most difficult of all has a different rule. Hence the old Greek maxim, *Gnōthi seauton*, still stands over the doorway to the Path, and, while one cannot say that the process here detailed is the only, or even the best, one, it is a sufficiently accurate delineation of what a serious student must undergo if he purposes to "know him-

self" with any deep or distinct vision. (See also *Path*, Vol. 3, p. 116; and Vol. 4, p. 329, "Culture of Concentration.")

QUESTION XLII.

Is it wise to greatly desire anything?

Ans.—Unless you are utterly apathetic or listless or oyster-like, you can't help greatly desiring something. A vigorous, active nature cannot be so in other departments without being so in desire. If it had no desire, it would have no motive; if no motive, no will; if no will, no action; and if it had none of these things, of what kind of humanity would it be? Theosophy does not emasculate human beings, or uphold the tortoise as the type of a well-spent life.

The wisdom of your great desire depends entirely upon its quality. If you desire inferior things,—those, we will say, which are the usual aim of mortals, there is no wisdom shown, for they are not only evanescent and unsatisfactory, but they invigorate the forces which are in direct antagonism to your higher interests, and which will ensure repetitions of your return to earth-life. But if your desire is a combination of a wish for spiritual enlightenment with a wish to secure it for others, it can hardly be too "great." It is the "violent" who "take the Kingdom of Heaven," not the lazy or the indifferent. If your aspirations are very moderate and easy-going, they will carry you along at the same pace; and if they are dominant and absorbing, you will make progress accordingly. "Kill out desire" obviously means desire for material existence with its concomitants: if it meant *spiritual* desire, *Light on the Path* would not have been written. But you must remember this,—that Theosophy counsels no disproportion or unpracticality; it tells you that right desire is the central spring to all right action, and that a rounded, dutiful life is one of the best proofs of the Theosophic spirit. If your spiritual desire is both correct and intense, it will manifest itself as well in the minutiæ of your daily occupations as in your interior cultivation and exterior beneficence. The more of such desire you have, the better; the bet-

ter for you and for all with whom you come in contact or can reach.

QUESTION XLIII.

The "Guardians of the Gods" opposite to the entrances to the temples in India are represented as having one foot on the head of a cobra; is this typical of the triumph of the Hindu religion over the worship of the serpent—or not?

W. Q. J.—I should say it is not. The serpent has many meanings, and to stand with the foot on its head might mean that you have obtained complete mastery over the lower nature, for the snake then stands for nature and its powers. And as the Hindu religion has a good deal in it about the serpent, the figures spoken of cannot mean the triumph of that religion over serpent worship.

QUESTION XLIV.

Was the "fall into generation" on the physical plane a normal feature of human evolution, as stated in some Theosophical books; or was it abnormal and not intended by nature, as said in other Theosophical books?

W. Q. J.—It would be well if every one were to quote when they say, "as said in some Theosophical books," giving name of writer and of book, for it is very unfair to the FORUM and any writer in it to be compelled to answer to the purport merely of a statement in some volume. The context of such statement might put the whole matter in a different light, or we might find that there was a misquotation.

It cannot be said by a well informed Theosophist that nature has any "intentions," nor should any man have the temerity to claim an acquaintance with those if they existed. If in the writings of some Theosophist a reference can be found to "nature's intentions," the context will certainly show that the words were used figuratively in describing apparently settled natural laws.

It seems to me that the "fall into generation," when explained Theosophically, is not abnormal. Since things are as they are under Karmic Law, according to law and not by chance, there can be no step in it that is abnormal. Besides this, the word "abnormal" is one that is used by us to designate that which appears to be out of the usual course solely because we do not know all the facts and factors. As in the case of the eccentric movements of certain planets, which led to the discovery of another one which had caused the eccentricity. Before the last one was found the movements of the others were certainly abnormal, but ceased to be so considered when the discovery was made. Hence "abnormal" is a word that describes a thing only relatively and not absolutely.

But H. P. Blavatsky, who is, we suppose, a good Theosophical authority, speaks clearly enough upon our question. In Vol. 2, *Secret Doctrine*, p. 62, line 19, she says: "Moreover, there are two 'Falls' in Theology: the rebellion of the Archangels and their 'Fall,' and the 'Fall' of Adam and Eve. Thus the lower as well as the higher Hierarchies are charged with a supposed crime. The word 'supposed' is the true and correct term, for in both cases it is founded *on a misconception.* Both are considered in Occultism as Karmic effects, and *both belong to the law of Evolution:* intellectual and spiritual on the one hand, physical and psychical on the other. The 'Fall' is a universal allegory." And on p. 228 of the same book she gives a more detailed view of the fall of certain of the Dhyanis "whose turn it was to incarnate as the Egos of the immortal, but *on this plane senseless*, monads," stating in the second paragraph on the same page: "the 'fall of *man*' was no fall, *for he was irresponsible.*"

Then as if to furnish forth the answer for the question as to the "intentions" of nature, the same author heads her explanation of Stanza 11 (in the 2d Vol., p. 52) "Nature unaided fails," and on p. 56, second paragraph, she says: "Thus physical nature, when left to herself in the creation of animal and man, is shown to have failed." If the second volume of the *Secret Doctrine* proves anything about "intentions" in the matter of evolution, it is that nature had none whatever, and, if she had, failure would follow attempt at realization. This subject is interesting and,

studied with the help of Madame Blavatsky's book, will be of benefit to the student.

QUESTION XLV.

In FORUM *No. 7 it is said that, when a Probationary Chela steps on the path, he will reach a goal in seven births. What becomes of him if he fails at the last; is he lost?*

Ans.—No, but that particular chance is. In that case he must make the attempt again, and make it till he succeeds. As to this the case is analogous to advancement from a lower to a higher class in College. If a Junior fails in his Junior Final, he is not demoted to be a Freshman, but neither can he enter the Senior class. He must remain a Junior till he has mastered that year's studies. And remember that there is no question of favoritism or mercy, nor of winking at shortcoming in one department because super-excellent in others: the full test has to be passed, or the aspirant must try afresh. And this not merely because all aspirants must be treated alike, but because a defect allowed to stand would disclose itself later and bring the process and the subject to confusion. A Chela, like a machine, is no stronger than his weakest part. Lastly, the word given to all Chelas at all stages, after all failures and succeeding every success, is—TRY.

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